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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 9

FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION

Written statement submitted by the Transnational Radical Party, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[7 March 1997]

Discrimination and stigmatization in the context of HIV/AIDS

1. After more than 15 years, AIDS is still a global pandemic, and people living with HIV/AIDS are still victims of stigmatization throughout the world. Stigma and discrimination are tragic effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, causing great human suffering and also undermining public health efforts to prevent further HIV spread. Stigma and discrimination are, without any doubt, the enemies of public health. For this reason, preventing discrimination toward HIV-infected people and those with AIDS has been made an essential part - for the first time in history - of the public health strategy in order to prevent and control the global epidemic.

2. In recent years, the epidemic has taught a large lesson: HIV/AIDS is not just a global health problem, and the rights of information, education, health and non-discrimination for all people, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, children, minorities, indigenous people, refugees, homosexuals, sex workers, drug users and prisoners, are the keys to stopping the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In fact, even the course of

the HIV/AIDS pandemic has stressed that vulnerability to becoming infected with HIV derives directly from stigma and discrimination. Systematic HIV-related human rights violations have been reported from many countries, perpetrated by governmental and non-governmental agencies in contradiction to internationally accepted public health standards, human rights treaties, and often local laws.

3. Discrimination and stigmatization are counterproductive to preventing and controlling HIV/AIDS, while anti-discrimination measures form a component part of an effective public health strategy. Therefore, Governments should take measures to avoid social stigmatization of and discrimination against those affected by HIV/AIDS, and strengthen national and international mechanisms that are concerned with HIV/AIDS-related human rights and ethics. Informed and responsible behaviour can prevent HIV transmission. This explains the role and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote, in a spirit of human solidarity and tolerance, a social environment that supports prevention of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

4. Tragically, the HIV epidemic continues to grow, and it is not by chance that the 90 per cent of those living with HIV/AIDS can be found in the developing countries, and within every society in which there are marginalized people living in poverty and suffering from inadequate human rights protection. But what is doubly tragic about the continuing growth of HIV infection is that the disease is entirely preventable. Numerous studies have confirmed that targeted prevention reduces risk behaviours and rates of new infections among women, communities of colour, heterosexuals, homosexuals and youth.

5. All States should monitor the status and the trends of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in order to interpret the changes in the trends, as well as to detect a potentially explosive epidemic in its early stages, especially in those countries and areas with potentially explosive epidemics such as India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia, several countries in West Africa, and South Africa.

6. All States need to take the necessary steps, including accessible and affordable health care, appropriate and speedy redress procedures, and the introduction of protective legislation and appropriate education to combat discrimination, prejudice and stigma, to ensure the full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights by people living with HIV/AIDS, their families and associates, with particular attention to women, children and vulnerable groups. All States need to strengthen their efforts to advance the legal, economic and social status of women, children and vulnerable groups to render them less vulnerable to the risk of HIV infection and to the adverse socio-economic consequences of the AIDS pandemic.

7. All States should ensure, where necessary, that their laws, policies and practices, including those regarding HIV/AIDS, respect human rights standards. These standards should include employment, travel without restrictions, and housing. They should also include the right to privacy and integrity of people living with HIV/AIDS and the prohibition of HIV/AIDS-related discrimination, without having the effect of inhibiting programmes for the prevention of HIV/AIDS and for the care of persons who are infected.

8. Recalling resolution 1996/43 of 19 April 1996 and other relevant resolutions and decisions adopted by bodies of the United Nations system, as well as by other competent forums,

Welcoming the Final Declaration of the Paris AIDS Summit, of 1 December 1994, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Copenhagen Declaration, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the New Delhi Declaration and Action Plan on HIV/AIDS: Law and Humanity, of 10 December 1995, in all of which the pledge was made to promote and protect the rights of people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS,

Welcoming also the establishment of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS),

Concerned that HIV/AIDS-related human rights issues are still not adequately addressed by United Nations human rights bodies and human rights non-governmental organizations,

Stressing the responsibility of Governments to take measures to counter stigmatization $ and discrimination against those affected by HIV/AIDS, and their commitment to strengthen national and international mechanisms that are concerned with HIV/AIDS-related human rights and ethics,

We ask the High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider appropriate methods to keep the protection of human rights in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic under continuous review, to monitor government and private practices that increase vulnerability to infection and discriminate against people living with HIV/AIDS, and to ensure that women, children, low-income and disadvantaged groups have equal access to available HIV information, education, health services, prevention methods and, most importantly, access to all the available medications;

We encourage the elaboration of guidelines, with the collaboration of the Centre for Human Rights and the UNAIDS, non-governmental agencies and others. In this regard, a reflection can be made on the possible organization of a second international expert consultation on human rights and AIDS;

We also ask the Secretary-General to consult with Governments, relevant United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations about the protection of human rights in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to submit to the fifty-third session of the Commission a progress report on the development of a human rights component in the United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS and on the status of the guidelines mentioned above.

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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by Liberation, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[11 March 1997]

1. The armed conflict on the island of Sri Lanka, the continuing violations of humanitarian law, and the genocidal proportions of the current Sri Lanka offensive in the Tamil homeland cause our organizations serious and grave concern.

2. As long ago as September 1983, the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, by resolution 1983/16, expressed its deep concern at the communal violence in the island, invited the Government of Sri Lanka to submit information concerning the violence and recommended to the Commission that it should examine the situation.

3. Three years later, in March 1987, the Commission, recalling its decision 1984/111 of 14 March 1984, by unanimous resolution (1987/61) called upon the parties to the armed conflict "to respect fully the universally accepted rules of humanitarian law", and appealed to Sri Lanka "to intensify its cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross in the fields of dissemination and promotion of international humanitarian law".

4. On 22 August 1990, at the forty-second session of the Sub-Commission, 17 non-governmental organizations called upon all parties to the conflict to abide by all the rules of humanitarian law governing armed conflicts, and to allow humanitarian aid operations by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other similar organizations.

5. In February 1993, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission, 24 non-governmental organizations, in a joint statement, declared:

> "Violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Sri Lanka continue to an alarming degree. We are particularly concerned because at this time the Government of Sri Lanka is making no effort to resolve the armed conflict in the North and East in any other way but militarily ... We urge the Commission to adopt a resolution on Sri Lanka in which it ... reminds all parties to the conflict of their obligations to comply fully with all humanitarian laws of armed conflict, including those set out in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 ...".

6. In the following year, in February 1994, at the fiftieth session of the Commission, 17 non-governmental organizations urged yet again that there was a need to recognize that the deep divisions between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil people could not be resolved by the use of force against Tamil resistance.

7. In August 1995, 19 non-governmental organizations in a joint written statement submitted to the forty-seventh session of the Sub-Commission said:

> "During the past 12 years, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission have heard hundreds of statements expressing grave concern at the situation prevailing in the island of Sri Lanka. The record shows that it was the oppressive actions of successive Sri Lankan Governments from as early as 1956 and in 1958, and again in 1961, and again with increasing frequency from 1972 to 1977, and culminating in the genocidal attacks of 1983 that resulted in the rise of the lawful armed resistance of the Tamil people."

8. We are alarmed that during the past year, Sri Lanka has intensified its genocidal war against the Tamil people. Tamil villages have been indiscriminately shelled and subjected to aerial bombardment. The "broad front" strategy adopted by the Sri Lankan Army, to "steamroller" their advance into the Tamil homeland has devastated acres of cultivable land, destroyed homes and forced hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians to flee their homes and seek refuge in the areas of the Tamil homeland remaining in the control of the Tamil resistance movement.

9. There are an estimated 400,000 displaced persons in the Vanni jungle region in the north of Sri Lanka that is largely under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Many of the displaced Tamils, possibly as many as half, do not receive government assistance, allegedly because the Government views the group as possible LTTE supporters. Sri Lanka has imposed an economic blockade on these areas and, in breach of humanitarian law, food and medicine have been used as weapons of war.

10. The plight of refugees and the displaced are of increasing concern. The camps are overcrowded and sanitary facilities almost non-existent. Water supply to the refugees in the Vanni remains a problem. Food is in short supply. The continual movement of the population following military operations makes distribution difficult and even the food that is available is not reaching many people.

11. Numerous cases of Sri Lanka's arbitrary retaliatory attacks on Tamil non-combatants, gang rape of Tamil women, arbitrary arrests, beatings and death due to torture have been reported in the areas of the Tamil homeland occupied by the Sri Lankan Army. The majority of arrests and detentions remain unacknowledged. Sri Lanka has also used shadowy paramilitary groups to abduct and torture Tamils. The Sinhala Army has gang-raped Tamil women and murdered them with impunity. There have been over 150 reported cases of rape during the past year.

12. The conclusion appears inescapable that Sri Lanka is trying to kill or terrorize as many Tamil people as possible.

13. Under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, acts of murder committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such are considered as acts of genocide. The actions of the Sri Lankan authorities in their war on the Tamil people amount to genocide. The evidence serves to establish the murder and rape of members of the group, torture and grave attacks on their physical and mental integrity, and the subjection of the group to conditions leading to their deaths.

14. Impunity for those responsible for human rights violations and breaches of humanitarian law remains a serious concern. Progress in a few court cases against members of the security forces charged in connection with "disappearances" and extrajudicial execution is slow, as are investigations into many other cases.

15. At the same time, the Sri Lankan Government has imposed tight press censorship. It is impossible for journalists to enter Jaffna without prior approval from the Government Censorship and restriction on access to the north have not only kept the public uninformed, but have also made the process of providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of war more difficult and have also concealed violations of humanitarian and human rights law.

16. We regret that the Sri Lankan Government continues to treat Tamil resistance to oppressive Sinhala rule as an "internal disturbance" and labels it as "terrorism" and in this way attempts to legitimize its genocidal onslaught on the Tamil people.

17. The conflict on the island is clearly an armed conflict, because the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are admittedly an organized armed force, under responsible command, exercising control over a part of the territory of the island, and able to carry out sustained and concerted military operations. It is a conflict in which Sri Lanka has mobilized a 150,000 strong army backed by a sophisticated air force and naval gun boats to pursue its ends.

18. In February 1988, LTTE announced that it would abide by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions 1949 and its Additional Protocols I and II. The existence of an armed conflict on the island has also been recognized by the Commission and in several statements made by non-governmental organizations at sessions of the Commission as well of the Sub-Commission during the past several years.

19. The conflict on the island is an armed conflict in which the Tamil people are fighting against alien Sinhala occupation in the exercise of their right to self-determination, and it is our view that the peaceful and just resolution of the conflict on the island will not be furthered by Sri Lanka's continued refusal to accord recognition to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as a party to an international armed conflict.

20. The two International Covenants on Human Rights law declare that all people have the right to self-determination. If democracy means rule of the people, by the people, for the people, why then is there no right to self-determination for the Tamil people? The right of self-determination means that no one people may rule another. The Tamil people have lived since ancient times within relatively well-defined geographical boundaries in the north and east of the island of Sri Lanka; they share an ancient heritage, a vibrant culture, and a living language which traces its origins back more than 2,500 years. They have, in addition, acquired a subjective political consciousness of oneness, by their life together in their traditional homeland and by their struggle against oppressive alien Sinhala rule, and they constitute a people, with a right to self-determination.

21. The war that Sri Lanka is waging against a people struggling to assert their right to self-determination is unlawful and unjust and the recent example of the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya serves to underline the urgent and imperative need for Sri Lanka to withdraw its armed forces from the Tamil homeland and in this way advance the peace process. We therefore urge the Commission:

(a) To condemn Sri Lanka's genocidal war against the Tamil people;

(b) To call upon Sri Lanka to withdraw its armed forces from the Tamil homeland in the north-east of the island of Sri Lanka and to end its war of aggression against the Tamil people; and

(c) To call upon the two parties to the armed conflict to secure a political solution which recognizes the right of the Tamil people to freely determine their political status.

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Agenda item 19

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the International Association of Educators for World Peace, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[13 March 1997]

GE.97-11037 (E)

1. Religious freedom is generally regarded as a basic human right which if suppressed results in grave consequences for the preservation and continuation of a rich cultural heritage and tradition. In many cases, religion becomes the very base of a culture and its approach to the universe and its habitants. Therefore, international human rights instruments, notably the International Covenants on Human Rights and United Nations conventions, place great importance on the respect for religious belief and freedom.

2. China, being a signatory to a number of United Nations conventions and as a member of the Commission on Human Rights, has obligations to respect religious freedom and not to suppress it. However, the Chinese authorities have not only failed to respect religious freedom in Tibet but also use religion as a tool to distort an ancient philosophy and procedures. On 26 November 1996, Xizang Ribao, an official Chinese newspaper in Tibet said:

> "... the influence of religion and traditional concepts are especially serious. Some cadres and people, instead of fostering lofty communist ideals, regard religious belief as their spiritual pillar; they have no faith in that only under the communist party's leadership and by taking the socialist road can a free, happy life become a reality, but regard turning of the wheel (of Tibetan Buddhism) and burning the incense as the 'magic medicine' for freeing oneself from suffering; they do not rely on science and civilization to transform the objective world, but use religion or superstitious ideas to obstruct the exploitation and utilization of resources; they do not use their wisdom and strength to serve the community and benefit the people, but waste their precious time to pursue the illusory next life; they do not use the limited financial resources to develop production, shake off poverty and become well off, but generously donate them to lamaseries; and they do not let their children receive modern education and become useful people of the country but send them to lamaseries to become monks and nuns."

3. Religious freedom remains severely restricted in Tibet in recent years due to numerous policy directives implemented by the Chinese authorities. These include the anti-Dalai Lama campaign; the ban on photographs of the Dalai Lama all over Tibet; interference in the recognition of the eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet; a ban on major religious festivals like the Great Prayer Festival of Lhasa; the "Strike Hard-Patriotic Re-education" campaign in monasteries and nunneries; and the "Last Battle" against the Dalai Lama.

4. Unable to break the determined devotion and loyalty of the Tibetan people to the Dalai Lama for more than 40 years, the Chinese authorities launched an unprecedented anti-Dalai Lama campaign after holding the "Third National Forum on Work in Tibet" at Beijing in 1994. Vitriolic attacks on the Dalai Lama subsequently appeared in materials used for political education and in January 1995, the campaign was publicly launched in the official media. By this time what was unusual was not the violence of the language used, but the

fact that it criticized the Dalai Lama on religious rather than political grounds. For the first time since 1979, the polemic attacked his religious standing and suitability for leadership:

> "The purpose of Buddhism is to deliver all living creatures in a peaceful manner. Now the Dalai and his clique have violated the religious doctrine and even have spread rumours to fool and incite one people against the other, in what way can he be regarded as a spiritual leader? ... As for Dalai, he has always incorporated 'Tibet Independence' into the doctrines which he preaches in his sermons, ... wildly attempting to use godly strength to poison and bewitch his masses ... Such flagrant deceptiveness and demagoguery constitute a blasphemy to Buddhism." 1/

5. In a further attempt to alienate the Dalai Lama from his people, on 26 January 1996, an order was issued by the Department of Culture of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" to remove all photographs of the Dalai Lama from Norbulingka and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The ban was eventually extended to all public institutions and private homes in Tibet. On 7 May 1996, a Chinese "work team" (gongzuo dui) arrived at Gaden monastery near Lhasa, tasked with removing all photographs of the Dalai Lama. The monks refused to cooperate, sparking off a riot. One monk, Kelsang Nyendrak, died after being shot by the Chinese authorities, and five other monks, including 14-year-old Gelek Jinpen, received bullet wounds. Reports attest to the arrest of 85 to 90. A few months later a number of monks were expelled as "fugitives". 2/ The monastery was closed for six months following the above incident.

6. As regards the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet, China, after more than a year of denials, finally admitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, that the boy was in Beijing's custody. However, China continues to refuse to declare publicly the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, his parents and Chadrel Rinpoche, the former abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas in central Tibet. The International Association of Educators remain deeply concerned about the incommunicado detention of this important child who is the second highest spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.

7. In April 1996, China launched the "Strike Hard or Crack Down Severely On Crimes" campaign, targeted at crushing corruption and crime. Within Tibet Chinese authorities have focused on "splittists" - individuals who support Tibetan independence and the leadership of the Dalai Lama. The main sub-campaign of "Strike Hard" within Tibet is the so-called "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" and followed from earlier campaigns, such as that of banning photographs of the Dalai Lama, which aimed to stifle politically active monks and nuns. The "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" in Tibet has led to widespread arrests and expulsions of monks and nuns who have refused to be "re-educated" along Chinese communist lines.

8. The re-education campaign was conducted by work teams who entered monasteries and nunneries to force monks and nuns to renounce Tibetan independence, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Gedhun Choeyki Nyima and the Panchen Lama. At Drepung monastery, near Lhasa, for example, 180 communist cadres were involved in the re-education sessions which began on 1 August 1996. Some of the propaganda materials released for this campaign included the following:

A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Tibetan History
A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Opposing Splittism
A Brief Explanation on Legal Knowledge
A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Religious Policy.

9. Human rights groups and other sources report more than 110 arrests and at least two deaths since China launched the campaign. Twenty-four of the arrests were a direct result of monks questioning a work team's form of education. Tenchok Tenphel, a 27-year-old monk, was reportedly arrested at Sakya monastery on 1 September 1996 in front of a re-education session. He died on 14 September at Sakya district prison. Although the Chinese authorities said that he died by "committing suicide", Tibetans allege that he had died as a result of torture in prison.

10. Another grave consequence of the above campaign in Tibet is the expulsion of monks who refused to accept the Chinese policy. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in India, 1,295 monks were expelled in 1996. Many of the expelled monks have fled to India and Nepal in recent months. "Those with a bad attitude to the studying and those with poor results or deliberately causing obstacles to the study will be severely criticized and their right to remain among the numbers of monks will be struck out," said an official notice handed to each monk at Sera monastery in mid-June 1996.

11. In January 1996, the Chinese authorities warned: "Those who make use of religion to interfere with administrative, judicial, martial, educational and other social affairs, especially those who take advantage of religious reasons to split the country, must be severely cracked down upon according to law." 3/ Three immediate tasks were identified in order to "clean-up problems in religion" in 1996: to order all places of worship to register; to deal with difficult religious problems of public concern; and to cultivate contingents of young patriotic religious preachers. In November 1996, the Chinese authorities launched another campaign called "Last Battle" against the Dalai Lama, aimed at eradicating any vestiges of the Dalai Lama's influence from all levels of society. Their report stipulated that the anti-splittist campaign, launched in the region's monasteries this year, must be broadened and signalled the adoption of "administrative measures to resolve the uncontrolled proliferation of religious festivals and shrines". The report by the "Tibet Central Committee" of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" stressed the strengthening of controls over daily life in the region which must also involve the close supervision of literature and the arts to ensure that they fulfil the socialist role of "serving the people" rather than propagating "spiritual garbage".

12. The above situation clearly shows that the Chinese authorities continue to impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion in Tibet and that the overall situation of human rights there has deteriorated in the past few years. The International Association of Educators for World Peace urgently appeals to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution condemning China for its dismal human rights record in Tibet.

Notes

1/ "Clearly understand the true nature of the Dalai clique, oppose splittism and safeguard stability", Xizang Ribao (Tibet daily), 10 March 1995.

2/ Tibet-One More Year of Political Repression, 1996 Annual Report-Human Rights in Tibet, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala, India, February 1997.

3/ Chinese State Councillor Ismail Amat, quoted by Xinhua News Agency.

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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by Human Rights Advocates, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[17 March 1997]

Debt relief conditioned upon microcredit programmes

1. Human Rights Advocates urges the Commission to pass a resolution creating a working group to study linking debt relief with the creation of microcredit programmes. Under agenda item 5, the Commission has before it a report of the Secretary-General on debt relief (E/CN.4/1997/17). That report discusses a meeting between the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the President of the World Bank. They agreed that they share a common objective: the well-being of the individual, and that well-being includes economic and social rights, as well as civil and political rights.

2. The High Commissioner and President of the World Bank pledged to set up a framework for cooperation and have stated that practical steps should be taken. We recommend that one practical step is to condition debt relief upon the creation of microcredit programmes. Debt interest payments that are forgiven would be paid directly into microcredit programmes.

3. Microcredit programmes have proven to be very effective. The essence of microcredit is the provision of loans to poor people, primarily women. The result is that when poor people are given a hand-up, instead of a hand-out, they pay back their loan, with interest. All they need is an opportunity. Loan default rates have been under 4 per cent. Some of the great thinkers in this world have realized that microcredit is a key element to the recognition of economic and social rights. For instance, microcredit was strongly supported at the State of the World Forum sponsored by the Gorbachev Foundation. Also, more than 2,000 people from around the world attended the Microcredit Summit in Washington D.C., where large financial institutions such as Citybank, government leaders, world bank officials and Hillary Clinton all pledged to support microcredit programmes to make loans to the 100 million poorest families on earth.

4. But these pledges, like the pledge of the High Commissioner and the President of the World Bank need practical steps. There needs to be funding. Debt relief is an excellent source of funding. Payment directly into a microcredit programme ensures that funds truly reach the poor people that need them. Furthermore, successful microcredit programmes have shown that once provided with initial working capital the programmes can become self-sustaining through the interest revenues made on the loans. Thus, the debt relief spawns an ongoing commercial enterprise rather than another aid programme that is dependent upon future contributions.

5. The solution of linking debt relief with microcredit programmes transcends the outdated North/South division on debt relief. We hope that the Commission will support the creation of a working group to address this issue.